

March 2003

Dear

I'm happy to respond to your request and glad your teacher is having you gather information about a time in history that this eighty two year old man was a part of. December 7, 1941. At that time, I was 20 years of age, a Seaman First Class (Sea 1c) and a member of the crew of the battleship U.S.S. Oklahoma.

I reported aboard the ship for duty in early fall of 1940. She was located at the Naval Ship Yards, Bremerton, Washington. After completing sea trials, we departed the West Coast to rejoin the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, arriving there at dawn December 6, 1940, a year and a day before the attack. We became part of Battle Division 1 under the command of Rear Admiral Isaac C Kidd, whose Flag ship was the U.S.S. Arizona. The other battleship in Bat. Div. 1 was our sister ship the U.S.S. Nevada. The Fleet conducted underway training in the Hawaiian waters through 1941. Our normal routine was underway training for two weeks at a time and then return to Pearl Harbor for one week for upkeep and replenishment of food, fuel, ammunition, ect..

Underway training consisted ^{of} fleet maneuvers, gunnery exercises, firing both the big surface to surface guns at surface targets towed by other ships and the anti-aircraft guns at targets towed by aircraft. We were always in competition with other battleships for the coveted "E" which stood for excellence and was painted on the side of the gun turret of the top gun in your battle division. There was competition in communications (signaling by flags, by blinker lights, by semaphore, and by telegraph key). (We humans have made huge advancement in this area for as I type this. I'm watching and listening to war live on television. Unfortunately, we have made little advancement in human relations.) There was competition in engineering between ships of the same class on how fuel efficient you were in running your ship. We worked and trained real hard when at sea.

When in port, the competition continued for the "IRON MAN" trophy. The trophy was awarded the ship that accumulated the most points in sporting events. The battleships and cruisers had their own baseball, football, boxing, wrestling, and rowing teams. The winners of each class of ships, competed for the Pacific Fleet title as champions. As mentioned, the ship with the over all most points, was awarded "THE IRON MAN" trophy. Life was good. You played hard and you worked

hard. You prepared for the war that at some immediate future date you were going to be engaged in; like it or not.

Now for personal happenings leading up to and through "THE DAY OF INFAMY": Battle Division 1 returned to port Friday, December 5, 1941 from fleet maneuvers. We continued preparing for a ship's readiness inspection by Admiral Kidd the following Monday. I was responsible for the cleanliness of a compartment and the equipment contained therein. My space and equipment were in good order. I requested shore leave for Saturday and Sunday. The lower ratings did not rate overnight liberty. We had to be back aboard by midnight, "Cinderella Liberty". However, if you had relatives ashore, you could request permission to remain overnight at their residence. I was fortunate. I did have uncle Ted and my mother's sister aunt Dorothy who lived on the beach in the little town of Haleiwa on the north shore of the Island. I did request and was granted overnight liberty.

Saturday morning, uncle Ted picked me up after personnel inspection and returned to his residence. I spent the rest of Saturday swimming and enjoying home cooked food. That night, we went spear fishing with a light. It was great fun. We were selective in what we speared and stopped fishing when we caught enough for Sunday's dinner.

Uncle Ted was in charge of the Army Officers Beach and his living quarters were located there. Once a month, on a Sunday, he had the additional duty of taking morning reports and reviewing them before passing the report up the line. December 7th was such a day. To carry out his duties, we had to drive some twelve miles to Schofield Barracks. We arrived at the main gate of Schofield Barracks just as the Japanese commenced their attack on the adjacent Wheeler Army Air Field. The primary target of the Japanese was the army fighter planes located at the air station.

I left uncle Ted at the main gate and headed for Pearl Harbor. I cannot tell you how I made it to the entrance gate of the Submarine Base. I've been over what's left of the old road at various speeds trying to figure out a time frame for the attack lasted just shy of two hours. I know not if I was in a state of shock or not. I do recall making it down to the small boat landing to catch a boat out to the ship. All one could see was fire and smoke all along "Battle Ship Row". I was told my ship had capsized. I became emotional, after all, she had been my home and her crew my family for over a year. I next found myself in the Torpedo Shop lending a hand as best I could for I knew nothing about torpedoes. I don't know how I ended up there either, but they needed muscle to shove an haul and that I could furnish. Since I was dressed in my clean white uniform, unlike the poor oil soaked

sailors they were rescuing from oily waters of the harbor, I was given the job of messenger, running information to the Operation Officer about the number of torpedoes that were ready to be place aboard the submarines that were at the dock. I cannot tell you the time I noticed the attack ended. That night I was patrolling the docks at the Submarine Base when a flight of planes approached Pearl Harbor. The anti-aircraft guns, machine guns, and small arms of all the ships in harbor capable of firing their guns started firing, lighting up the sky sufficiently for me to see the ships in the slips across the harbor from my dock. Unfortunately, we found out later, they were our own planes from one of our aircraft carriers trying to land at the Naval Air Station Ford Island in the middle of the harbor. The state of art of communication in those days, unlike today's, prohibited the notification of every one of the aircraft's intent. Every one was pretty jumpy and scared after what had taken place that morning.

I was to find out at a later date, that the U.S.S. Oklahoma capsized after being hit by nine torpedoes and she did so within eleven minutes of the start of the attack. The U.S.S. Oklahoma suffered the lose of 429 men. The ship was raised in late 1944, but not brought back to battle conditions. The U.S.S. Arizona had the largest lose of life, 1177 men. She rests where she sank that morning and now is a National Memorial for all who perished, military and civilian, that day. The U.S.S. Nevada was raised and repaired, the only battleship in Battle Division 1 to return to the fleet and the war.

As to my feelings, I cannot nor will I ever so long as I live, forget December 7, 1941 and the many men who lost their lives that day. I have forgiven those Japanese for the attack. Now, I could not ask this of the relatives of those men who lost their lives. I could not live my whole remaining life with the bitterness and hatred I felt that day. I consider myself a Christian.

I hope this letter will fulfill your request. I thank you for allowing me to write of the events and times surrounding a turning point in America's history.

Sincerely,



Richard C. Husted
Commander. United States Navy Retired